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***NATIONAL DEFENSE UNIVERSITY***  
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**JOINT ADVANCED WARFIGHTING SCHOOL**



**MILITARY INNOVATION IN THE NEW NORMAL**

by

**Charles R. Cassidy**

***Lieutenant Colonel, United States Marine Corps***

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# MILITARY INNOVATION IN THE NEW NORMAL

by

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A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Joint Advanced Warfighting School in partial satisfaction of the requirements of a Master of Science Degree in Joint Campaign Planning and Strategy. The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Joint Forces Staff College or the Department of Defense.

This paper is entirely my own work except as documented in footnotes.

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## **ABSTRACT**

After more than a decade of counterinsurgency and stability operations, the strategic security environment is different and the joint force must rebalance military capabilities across the strategic defense framework. However, conflict exists between short-term desires and long-term imperatives. Recent changes in organization and employment by some elements of the joint force, although appearing as a panacea to the next Benghazi-like catastrophe, are merely innovations for innovation's sake and not appropriate adaptations to the environment. If not informed by further study of the last decade of war, misguided innovation focused on mitigating crises and deterring conflict only threatens national security by compromising the military's ability to defeat adversaries decisively when the need arises.

This essay argues that emerging organizational and employment trends are an over-reaction to the current security environment stemming from strategic guidance that puts a premium on innovation, crisis response, and engagement. The essay looks at how some emerging initiatives compromise military capabilities by spreading the force too thin, degrading long-term readiness for shortsighted perceived gains. It presents several vulnerabilities stemming from the strategic guidance, its implementation, and misperceptions taken from the last decade. It then offers recommendations to correct the apparent logic fallacies informing the guidance and associated service approaches. Finally, the essay presents alternative options to rebalance the force, including a potentially more appropriate target for innovation other than the joint force.

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## **Chapter 1**

### **Defining the Problem**

Emerging from over a decade of sustained combat operations, the joint force is under pressure to reset for future conflict amidst extreme fiscal limitations. Continually evolving strategic guidance over the last several years highlights the complex, dynamic security issues facing the nation and drives the Department of Defense (DoD) towards rebalancing to meet the demands of this ‘new normal’ environment. Required to do more with less, the joint force must consider cutting capabilities and capacity while retaining the means and readiness to respond across the spectrum of conflict, all while servicing an ever increasing list of steady state requirements imposed by the geographic combatant commanders (GCC). As expected, for manpower-centric services such as the U.S. Army and Marine Corps, this requires finding ways to protect organizational structure. For technology-centric services like the U.S. Air Force and Navy, it means preserving costly programs like the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter (JSF).

With little regard to the potential implications, the 2014 Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR) directs the joint force to innovate to meet the demands of the future. Without specific focus, the broad call to innovate became the central theme for the DoD, as if blindly reorganizing the force provides for the requisite capabilities moving forward.<sup>1</sup> In reality, these conditions have created an apparent bid for relevancy across the joint force. The Army and Marine Corps market themselves as crisis response and military engagement organizations vital to strategy success, while the Air Force and

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. Department of Defense, *Quadrennial Defense Review 2014*, (Washington, DC: Washington Printing Office, 2014), Secretary’s cover letter.

Navy posture to retain major programs, trumpeting the primacy of deterrence and technological overmatch against near-peer competitors, no matter how unlikely such conflict may be. The unspoken irony is that while the Air Force and Navy innovate by preserving high-cost weapon systems for a war no one expects to fight, the Army and Marine Corps willingly reorganize for the most likely commitments. Unfortunately, given the proclivities of the American way of war, history demonstrates these types of commitments typically incur excessive cost in blood and treasure without achieving desired policy outcomes.

The joint force is vulnerable. Absent clear strategic focus or definable acceptance of risk, and under the pressure of competing demands, the joint force charges willingly forward under misguided pretenses. Clearly, capabilities and capacity must reset and accommodate the realities of the emergent security environment. However, the joint force must reconcile how it incorporates the exigencies of the new normal or risk evolving in potentially hazardous ways. Ultimately, the joint force must resist the urge to innovate for innovations sake and guard against service parochialisms that compartmentalize and degrade essential capabilities and reduce long-term readiness.

Specifically, the Army and Marine Corps must restrain their fervor for relevancy and focus on warfare primacy in their respective domains. An increasingly unstable world needs strong, viable land components whether policy makers and strategists realize it or not. By confusing forward presence with capacity, and ignoring organizational limitations born from misinterpretation of lessons taken over a decade of counterinsurgency warfare in mature theaters, these elements of joint force risk spreading too thin, diverging from conventional warfare primacy, and causing wholesale

manpower, training, and equipment innovation for misguided purposes. Continued reorganization and employment of small, fragmented formations in the hope of quelling every potential threat to national interests only risks sending service members into far-flung crises undertrained, under armed, and overwhelmed. Conversely, the Air Force and Navy must divorce themselves from the revolution in military affairs mindset and grasp the realities of the environment they face. Winning the clash of wills occurs in the human domain, and unless America engages in another contest for survival, technology better serves enabling other elements of the joint force, not trying to bomb adversaries into submission with surgical precision.

This essay highlights the inherent risks in the current joint force innovative direction by first defining the contemporary environment, highlighting key elements of the strategic guidance shaping the joint force, and presenting examples of joint force innovative direction. It then presents the positive and negative aspects of the joint force's approach, highlighting areas of risk that threaten the long-term readiness of the force. Finally, the essay offers several recommendations to mitigate this risk as the joint force postures for the future.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Where We Are Now**

Assessing the environment is the first step in understanding the current joint force direction and the factors influencing it. This chapter provides a framework for the environment by analyzing two principle elements. First, it defines the new normal environment and briefly discusses key elements of strategic guidance shaping the joint force. Then it highlights the prevailing strategic outlooks and corresponding innovative initiatives of the service components.

#### ***The New Normal Security Environment***

The term ‘new normal’ increasingly describes the strategic security environment in contemporary military circles.<sup>1</sup> The acronym VUCA (volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous) is a useful memory aid rapidly quantifying the new normal. However, this construct mostly typifies prevailing perspectives emerging after the Cold War, as the world wrestled with the breakup of the Soviet Union and the demise of colonialism while adapting to unipolar, democratic influences. To understand what is truly ‘new’ today and important to the future requires a deeper dive into the modern security environment.

Several changes in the strategic environment give it a truly ‘new’ perspective. First, technological advances and the globally integrated economy enable the increased diffusion of technology to non-state actors. This diffusion puts dangerous capabilities into the hands of individuals or groups with significantly fewer limitations governing

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<sup>1</sup> References to the new normal exist in military journals, government reports, joint force strategic outlooks, and mainstream media alike. For example, specific references appear in defense publications *Proceedings* and *Parameters*, the 2013 Senate subcommittee report on Benghazi, and the 2014 Marine Corps posture statements. Additional references appear in online news sources such as *Huffington Post* and *Defense One*.

their intent in employing them. Unlike traditional states who must carefully consider disincentives for their actions, non-state actors now have access to capabilities traditionally reserved for nation states, with correspondingly few rules to abide by. Second, the influence of digital technology and increased use of social media plays a role. It enables communication that can have both positive and negative effects. Its low cost and broad reach enable incidents to transition rapidly from isolated events to transnational issues. Third, increased access to space and the influence of cyber represent two emergent domains gaining significance. Fourth, population expansion, natural resource shortfalls, and other threats to the natural environment add layers of complexity that policy and strategy must consider.<sup>2</sup>

Several layers of strategic guidance incorporate these new normal nuances and shape the joint force's direction.<sup>3</sup> The 2014 *Quadrennial Defense Review* (QDR) provides the most current version of strategic guidance. Significant to the 2014 QDR are the central themes of innovation and rebalancing, placing innovation "center stage" as a foundational component for the joint force moving forward.<sup>4</sup> Overall, the 2014 QDR presents little new material in terms of understanding the strategic environment or providing direction

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<sup>2</sup> U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Capstone Concept for Joint Operations: Joint Force 2020*, Chairman's Strategic Guidance (Washington, DC: September 2012), 2-3.

<sup>3</sup> Of the various influences, there are four documents providing the key directive guidance: the 2010 *National Security Strategy* (NSS), the 2012 *Defense Strategic Guidance* (DSG), and the 2012 *Capstone Concept for Joint Operations* (CCJO), and the 2014 *Quadrennial Defense Review* (QDR).

<sup>4</sup> U.S. Department of Defense, *Quadrennial Defense Review 2014*, (Washington, DC: Washington Printing Office, 2014). The defense secretary's cover letter emphasizes innovation and it resonates throughout the document, even appearing as a standalone component of the document in chapter two. The QDR's strategic guidance also advances three important initiatives. First, the QDR provides an updated defense strategy building on the 2012 *Defense Strategic Guidance* (DSG). This updated strategic framework consists of three pillars: protecting the homeland, building security globally, and projecting power and winning decisively. Second, the QDR highlights how the DoD rebalances towards meeting the requirements of the new normal environment. Third, the QDR demonstrates the defense department's intent to control internal growth costs threatening the force. For more information regarding the initiatives, see pages: 12-21, 27-41, and 43-51.

to the joint force. Arguably, it only summarizes the current understanding of the new normal environment and corresponding broad array of operational requirements placed on the joint force while directing innovation as the principle means to meet these requirements within future budget limitations. The key take-away being an understanding that the layers of guidance shaping the force originated from years of iterative assessments and conclusions of the strategic environment, lessons learned from ongoing combat operations, and perceived future requirements.

Overall, the new normal acknowledges traditional realist concerns, but assumes that large-scale conventional combat operations against nation states are not likely in the near future.<sup>5</sup> Instead, it recognizes the increased significance and threat of non-state actors in protecting U.S. interests and maintaining regional stability. The new normal requires the joint force to operate across the spectrum of conflict, but stresses that small, rapidly developing crises are the most likely near-term threats. The final consideration is the fiscal reality of the future. Continued deficit spending by the U.S. Government (USG) has taken a substantial toll on defense budgets. Although the extent of budget limitations remains speculative as sequestration and Budget Control Act debates continue, defense personnel and procurement drawdowns are a foregone conclusion.

### ***Current Joint Force Direction***

Charged to innovate and maintain a wide range of capabilities across the spectrum of conflict, the military services took varied approaches. The Army and Marine Corps aggressively focused on innovating towards crisis response and engagement to meet the

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<sup>5</sup> U.S. Department of Defense, *Guidance for Employment of the Force*, Redacted Edition (Washington, DC: August 2012), 9.



perceived demands of the new normal environment. Conversely, the Navy and Air Force showed more innovative restraint, instead focusing on defending their high-end, technology-based capabilities that increasingly satiate America's penchant for bloodless military intervention, a belief firmly nested in the revolution in military affairs debate. The following highlights various aspects of each service's innovative approach.

The U.S. Army Chief of Staff, General Ray Odierno stated in his strategic intent, "the ability to win wars on land remains our reason for being."<sup>6</sup> The U.S. Army also traditionally maintains a robust forward presence through both rotational deployments and permanent basing. However, there are two principle themes defining how the Army sees its role resetting after major combat operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. First, the Army sees itself taking a greater role in preventing conflict through increased presence and engagement activities.<sup>7</sup> Second, the Army focuses on being more globally responsive and able to respond quickly to small scale, rapidly developing contingencies.<sup>8</sup>

The Regionally Aligned Forces (RAF) concept is the U.S. Army's primary innovation in the new normal environment. The RAF concept aligns forces to specific geographic and functional combatant commands in an effort to provide more flexible, deployable, scalable forces in direct support of combatant command requirements.<sup>9</sup> The RAF concept builds on the traditional special operations force (SOF) approach of

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<sup>6</sup> Raymond T. Odierno, "CSA's Strategic Intent: Delivering Strategic Landpower in an Uncertain World," (February 5, 2013), <http://www.army.mil/article/95729/> (accessed December 10, 2014).

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> William T. Eliason, "An Interview with Raymond T. Odierno," *Joint Forces Quarterly* 75 (4th Quarter, 2014): 8-10. More specifically, for the Army this means resetting service-wide expectations associated with expeditionary operations in mature theaters to being more self-sufficient and able to operate in austere conditions. This also means being able to task organize smaller, more agile and tailored forces to meet varying needs from security cooperation to humanitarian support to combat operations.

<sup>9</sup> U.S. Department of the Army, *A Statement on the Posture of the United States Army 2014*, Posture Statement presented to the 113<sup>th</sup> Congress, 2d session by John M. McHugh and Raymond T Odierno (Washington, DC: April, 2014), 4-5.

aligning groups to achieve regional expertise and enable relationship building.<sup>10</sup> The Army sources RAFs from the total force, consisting of continental based, forward deployed, and rotational units and capabilities.<sup>11</sup> Fundamentally, RAFs provide combatant commanders the capabilities to better accomplish steady state activities as well as respond to the most likely contingencies.<sup>12</sup> The RAF concept is a significant paradigm shift for the Army in that it assigns and allocates more forces than ever before in a non-wartime setting and directs units to train towards specific requirements based on the habitual relationships instead of training towards traditional land power dominance at the discretion of local commanders.<sup>13</sup> As General Odierno's vision drives the Army towards increased presence in support of steady state operations, enhanced response capabilities, and expeditionary mindsets, the RAF concept operationalizes his intent.

Similar to the Army, the Marine Corps also places response and engagement activities at the top of its priority list.<sup>14</sup> Given its traditional expeditionary nature, emphasis on crisis response and engagement by the Marine Corps comes as no surprise. Combined with the intent to maintain approximately one third of the operating forces forward deployed at all times, two other key emerging initiatives frame the Marine Corps' principle steps towards innovation in the new normal.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 5. The RAF concept is also similar to the National Guard's State Partnership Program in its ability to maintain long-term partnership relationships.

<sup>11</sup> Kimberly Field, James Learnmont, and Jason Charland, "Regionally Aligned Forces: Business Not as Usual," *Parameters* 43 (Autumn 2013): 56.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 56.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 59.

<sup>14</sup> United States Marine Corps, *Expeditionary Force 21 Forward and Ready: Now and in the Future*, Service Strategic Vision (Washington, DC: March 2014), 26. The term crisis appears approximately eighty times throughout the document providing a distinct emphasis to the primacy of focus of the contemporary Marine Corps resetting after Iraq and Afghanistan.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 16.

The first innovation is a change in employment practices of Marine Expeditionary Units (MEU) forward deployed on U.S. Naval Amphibious Ready Groups (ARG).<sup>16</sup> To meet the growing demand for forces by geographic combatant commanders, today's ARG/MEU forces find themselves operating increasingly split and disaggregated.<sup>17</sup> Recently, the Marine Corps published guidance essentially acknowledging that this form of employment is an accepted deviation from traditional doctrinal practices despite the disadvantages and limitations it introduces.<sup>18</sup>

The second principle innovation lies in the establishment of Special Purpose Marine Air-Ground Task Force Crisis Response (SPMAGTF-CR) units. Developed as an interim solution to fill a capability shortfall in available amphibious lift, the SPMAGTF-CR concept provides additional capacity to combatant commanders to meet multi-role crisis response force and engagement requirements.<sup>19</sup> The SPMAGTF-CR units are comprised

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<sup>16</sup> The forward deployed ARG/MEU construct provides combatant commanders a versatile maritime presence capable of fulfilling a myriad of tasks across the spectrum of conflict, from deterrence to enabling operations in support of major combat operations. Embarked across three amphibious ships that comprise the ARG, the forward deployed Marines form a Marine Air-Ground Task Force (MAGTF). All MAGTFs consist of a command element, ground combat element, air combat element, and logistics element and are essentially self-sufficient organizations, tailored in size to meet a wide range of contingencies.

<sup>17</sup> Review of MEU after action and lessons learned reports, coupled with the author's personal experience with 26<sup>th</sup> MEU from 2012-2013, indicates employment practices increasingly drive the three ships of the ARG/MEU towards split or disaggregated operations. Split operations require the ARG/MEU to operate separately for a given time duration with the ARG/MEU commanders retaining control of their forces while under the same geographic combatant commander (GCC). Disaggregated operations require elements to operate outside the ARG/MEU commander's control either under a single GCC or across multiple GCCs. Although enabling greater task accomplishment and increased presence over larger geographic areas, these methods of employment reduce overall effectiveness and capabilities of the ARG/MEU by separating elements of the MAGTF. In other words, the whole is greater than the sum of the parts and breaking the ARG apart does not provide three separate mini-MAGTFs. The opposite actually occurs as leadership span of control, command authorities, and amphibious shipping limitations restrict response and capability options.

<sup>18</sup> For more information see, United States Navy and United States Marine Corps, *Disaggregated Amphibious Ready Group/Marine Expeditionary Unit Concept of Employment*, (Washington, DC: August 2014).

<sup>19</sup> U.S. Marine Corps, *36<sup>th</sup> Commandant's Planning Guidance: Innovate, Adapt, Win*, Service Planning Guidance (Washington, DC: 2015), 12; United States Marine Corps, *2014 Report to Congress on the Posture of the United States Marine Corps*, Presented by James F. Amos (Washington, DC: March 2014), 12.

of the traditional MAGTF elements, forward deploy to fixed positions, and possess the ability to self-deploy for limited contingency and engagement activities.<sup>20</sup> The Marine Corps' desired end state is three forward deployed SPMAGTF-CR units located in Europe, the Middle East, and the Pacific.<sup>21</sup>

The direction of the U.S. Air Force and Navy appears more towards retaining core capabilities and less towards innovating to meet most-likely challenges of the new normal environment. The Air Force readily acknowledges that changes in the security environment occurred. Its 2014 posture statement focuses on the aspects of proliferation of technology and increased lethality of potential threats. However, the Air Force's highest priority remains the high-end fight.<sup>22</sup> The main concern looking to the future is the fiscal restraints facing the service as it pertains to retaining high-end programs. Consequently, cost saving initiatives actively divest and consolidate programs such as the A-10, U-2, and old versions of the Global Hawk.<sup>23</sup> However, the Air Force also seeks investment opportunities in new programs over upgrading legacy equipment that arguably still achieves relative supremacy given the near term realities of peer competitor capabilities. For example, U.S. Air Force's top acquisition priorities are the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter, long-range strike bomber (LRS-B), and KC-46A aerial tanker despite the continued utility of the F-22 Raptor, B-1 Spirit stealth bomber, and B-1B Lancer.<sup>24</sup>

Like the Air Force, the U.S. Navy appears centrally focused on funding major ship building programs while offering little in terms of innovating towards the most likely

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<sup>20</sup> U.S. Marine Corps, *2014 Report to Congress on the Posture of the United States Marine Corps*, Presented by James F. Amos (Washington, DC: March 2014), 4.

<sup>21</sup> U.S. Marine Corps, *Expeditionary Force 21 Forward and Ready: Now and in the Future*, 17.

<sup>22</sup> U.S. Air Force, *Fiscal Year 2015 Air Force Posture Statement*, Presented by Deborah Lee James and Mark Welsh II (Washington, DC: March 2014), 9.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

threats. For example, the Navy's top programmatic priority is maintaining credible, modern, and survivable deterrence with the Ohio class ballistic missile submarine (SSBN), despite no viable threat requiring such a deterrent capability.<sup>25</sup> Generally, there is little discussion by the Navy regarding the future operational environment.<sup>26</sup> Further, although the Navy acknowledges and directs capabilities towards the emergent Air-Sea Battle construct focused on anti-access / area denial (A2/AD), it offers no mention of other essential maritime concepts such as the *Cooperative Strategy of 21st Century Sea Power*.<sup>27</sup> Overall, the Navy's 2014 posture statement predominantly emphasizes the fiscal constraints of funding the fleet of 2020. The majority of the posture statement articulates maritime capabilities only as they relate to the 2015 presidential budget submission, not the future security environment.<sup>28</sup> In the end, the Navy's current strategic direction offers little insight into how the Navy actually adapts or innovates to meet the realities of the new normal security environment.

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<sup>25</sup> U.S. Department of the Navy, *FY2015 Department of the Navy Posture*, Presented by Jonathan Greenert (Washington, DC: March 2014), 4-6. The five subsequent priorities include sustaining forward presence; preserving the means to respond to simultaneous contingencies across two separate regions (this is defined by winning decisively in one while sufficiently holding and/or deterring in the other); ensuring afloat and ashore readiness; sustaining or enhancing asymmetric capabilities; and sustaining the industrial base.

<sup>26</sup> The Navy only tacitly acknowledges current and projected threats informed its direction in determining its strategic approach on page 6 of the CNO's posture statement. There is no substantial recognition of the operational environment articulated in either of the current CNO Sailing Directions or Navigational Plans, the strategic vision documents published by the service chief.

<sup>27</sup> A collaborative document among the U.S. Navy, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard, *A Cooperative Strategy for 21st Century Sea Power*, published in 2007, articulates the sea service's collective commitment towards evolving and expanding capabilities to meet the demands of the future environment. The strategy discusses several characteristics now referred to as the new normal environment. It specifically emphasizes how sea power influences actions both at sea and ashore by providing the required speed, flexibility, and agility in proximate locations to where the majority of the world's population lives and works. In many ways, the declarative strategy foreshadowed contemporary the strategic assessment and guidance forming the nation's defense framework today.

<sup>28</sup> The 2014 USN posture statement references to the 2015 presidential budget over eighty times throughout the document in articulating Navy readiness and future capabilities.

### **Chapter 3**

## **The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly**

Within the guidance and initiatives shaping the joint force, there are varying degrees of risk. At one end of the spectrum are many valuable lessons giving rise to positive change and growth in the force. At the other end, there is great danger in the precedents being set. This chapter introduces the good, the bad, and the ugly sides of the current joint force direction. It begins with highlighting what the joint force is doing right. It then discusses vulnerabilities in the current direction. The chapter concludes with highlighting the worst-case scenario associated with these vulnerabilities.

### ***The ‘Good’ News: We Are Doing Some Things Right***

The good news story is that fundamental goodness exists in understanding the new normal environment, various elements of strategic guidance, and some service initiatives. For example, new normal considerations such as: the potential for rapidly developing, small scale crisis; the proliferation of technology to non-state actors; the increased likelihood of asymmetrical warfare instead of conventional combat operations; and the role of the cyber domain are all realities the joint force recognizes moving forward.<sup>1</sup> This enhanced understanding of the environment clearly improves strategic decision-making. Similarly, institutionalizing these considerations directly strengthens the joint force’s ability to organize, prepare, plan, and effectively respond to future requirements.

As articulated in the 2014 QDR, retaining the knowledge and experience gained from over ten years of irregular warfare, while adjusting force structure to avoid costly

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. Department of Defense, *Quadrennial Defense Review 2014*, (Washington, DC: Washington Printing Office, 2014), 3-7.

counterinsurgency operations, is also non-debatable logic.<sup>2</sup> Specifically, lessons in cultural awareness gained from the years of sustained counterinsurgency warfare clearly benefit the joint force.<sup>3</sup> This adaptation directly enabled operational effectiveness, and retaining this important lesson is essential for enhancing future engagement activities.

Regaining the expeditionary mindset is another valid emerging concept. U.S. Army Chief of Staff, General Ray Odierno, rightly concludes that the Army must be capable of dealing with the spectrum of contingencies without the benefit of the mature theaters of operation that the joint force grew accustomed to over recent years.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, the Marine Corps' focus on returning to its amphibious roots is sound investment that increases readiness, generates options, and increases flexibility and responsiveness within the joint force. Another logical adaptation is the Marine initiative to increase embassy security guards and create the Marine Special Augmentation Unit (MSAU) in support of DoS embassy security.<sup>5</sup> This initiative logically adapted force structure and employment options to meet the emergent demands of the environment. Theoretically, the initiative should reduce the demand for joint force security and crisis response forces by enabling DoS to fulfill its own diplomatic security responsibilities.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., EXSUM, p. VII.

<sup>3</sup> Early in Afghanistan and Iraq, the joint force assimilated many valuable lessons from cultural missteps with population centric, low intensity combat operations that quickly transitioned into traditional counterinsurgency warfare. The conventionally focused joint force, designed predominantly to combat near peer competitors on the field of battle, fundamentally lacked many of the nuanced language, social, religious, and other cultural sensitivities more akin to SOF units. Adapting in-stride, the joint force rapidly institutionalized cultural awareness and language training in deploying units.

<sup>4</sup> William T. Eliason, "An Interview with Raymond T. Odierno," *Joint Forces Quarterly* 75 (4th Quarter, 2014): 8-10.

<sup>5</sup> In response to calls from Congress, the Marine Security Guard (MSG) program increased by roughly 1,000 personnel, providing additional manpower support to its diplomatic security mission with DoS. This included the creation of the Marine Special Augmentation Unit (MSAU); a scalable, quick reaction force designed to respond directly to calls from DoS and reinforce posts and/or missions in need.

<sup>6</sup> Embassy security is the responsibility of DoS. The DoD is not the principle agency responsible for security but provides enduring resources to DoS such as Marine security guards and augmentation when requested and approved.

***The ‘Bad’ News: The Joint Force Vulnerabilities***

Contrary to the good news, there are several vulnerabilities evident in the current joint force direction. These vulnerabilities exist in the guidance shaping the force, contradictions between the guidance and its implementation, and the significant costs associated with attaining the desired joint force capabilities. These vulnerabilities portend potential, long-term repercussions for national security.

**Innovation for Innovation’s Sake.** The first vulnerability is the overarching approach to innovate presented in the 2014 QDR. The QDR’s blanket call to innovate was an irresponsible proposition by strategic leaders. This approach took the easy way out of thinking through the challenges and limitations facing the joint force, by placing the burden on subordinates to find solutions to the increasingly complex problems associated with the emerging security environment.

Senior RAND political scientist Adam Grissom argues that military innovation shares three key elements: innovation involves major changes in organization; is significant in terms of scope and impact; and produces increased effectiveness.<sup>7</sup> Conversely, military adaptation corresponds to less intrusive change to organizations within the military as it adjusts to the operational environment. Military adaptation essentially equates to in-stride adjustments to overcome operational challenges or accommodate other external influences within the operational environment.<sup>8</sup>

Given this framework, and based on the relative magnitude and scope of change, innovation must be challenged thoroughly for legitimacy and relevancy. More simply,

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<sup>7</sup> Adam Grissom, “The Future of Military Innovation Studies,” *Journal of Strategic Studies* 29, no.5 (October 2006), 907.

<sup>8</sup> Theo Farrell, “Introduction: Military Adaptation in War,” in *Military Adaptation in Afghanistan*, edited by Theo Farrell, Frans Osinga, and James Russell (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2013), 2-4.



innovation must take the long view, not losing sight of long-term implications while being blinded by shortsighted goals better suited to adaptation. Therefore, any form of innovation requires careful consideration, which is complicated significantly by the fundamental problem of prediction. Similarly, the essential element present in nearly all examples of successful innovation is specificity.<sup>9</sup> In simplest terms, innovation needs legitimate purpose and clearly defined goals. Unfortunately, current strategic guidance does not provide specificity given the range of requirements coupled with the dynamic, unpredictable nature of the new normal environment.

Looking at today's joint force, monitoring and managing adaptation versus innovation becomes critical considering that, "adaptation can, and often does, lead to innovation when multiple adjustments over time gradually lead to the evolution of new means and methods."<sup>10</sup> If current adaptations evolve into innovation that alters the essential capabilities of the U.S. military, the joint force risks being improperly manned, trained, and equipped for the next conflict that threatens vital national interests. For example, inadvertent changes in organization and proficiency in conducting major ground combat operations is a prime consideration the Army and Marine Corps must reconcile. Although unlikely in the near future, large-scale conventional contingencies are not a forgone construct of the past given that nation-states are still the principle governors of international order.<sup>11</sup> This argument is not about not innovating, it is about

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<sup>9</sup> Williamson Murray and Allan R. Millet, *Military Innovation in the Interwar Period* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 311.

<sup>10</sup> Theo Farrell and Terry Terriff, "The Sources of Military Change," in *The Sources of Military Change: Culture, Politics, Technology*, edited by Theo Farrell and Terry Terriff (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2002), 6.

<sup>11</sup> U.S. Department of Defense, *Guidance for Employment of the Force*, Redacted Edition (Washington, DC: August 2012), 9.

limiting any sweeping revolutionary change that endangers the joint force's ability to cope with the unknowns of tomorrow effectively.

**Contradictions between Guidance, Interpretation, and Action.** Contradictions between strategic guidance and joint force direction represent the second vulnerability. These contradictions appear in interpretations of the strategic guidance by the joint force and actions taken within the joint force itself. If not resolved, these contradictions perpetuate unhealthy employment precedents that threaten future readiness and reduce overall joint effectiveness by compartmentalizing capabilities of the force.

First, there are elements of the 2010 NSS that apparently fell on deaf ears. The 2010 NSS acknowledges the inherent inability to deter or prevent every possible threat and addresses the requirement to improve resilience in meeting the challenges of tomorrow.<sup>12</sup> The 2010 NSS also warns against displaying fear and overreacting to violent extremist threats.<sup>13</sup> However, the emphasis on crisis response and expeditionary responsiveness by the Army and Marine Corps, displays the exact opposite approach. The Marine Corps' intent for enabling responsiveness by maintaining approximately one third of its operational forces forward deployed and the creation of shore-based SPMAGTFs following the terror attack in Benghazi, Libya are prime examples.<sup>14</sup> These initiatives represent misguided attempts to prepare for an insurmountable quantity of potential threats despite specific guidance acknowledging the fruitlessness of such efforts.

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<sup>12</sup> President Barak Obama, *2010 National Security Strategy*, (Washington, DC: Government printing office, May 2010), 18.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>14</sup> U.S. Marine Corps, *Expeditionary Force 21 Forward and Ready: Now and in the Future*, Service Strategic Vision (Washington, DC: March 2014), 16.

The 2010 NSS also calls for strengthening capacity through a more whole of government approach.<sup>15</sup> However, a recent study indicates the execution of U.S. regional foreign and defense policies relies predominantly on geographic combatant commands.<sup>16</sup> Further, combatant command military engagement activities are security cooperation centric and generally focused on military capacity building, relationships, and assured access.<sup>17</sup> Under this construct, there are obvious benefits to building the security force capacity of partner nations in both their external and internal statutory requirements, such as enabling self-defense and augmenting civil response to disaster relief efforts. However, there are also drawbacks with this approach. Over-investment in military capacity development risks compromising other essential public or civil development requirements in partner nations. Further, increasing partner security capacity for internal roles and missions should only occur in support of and upon completion of larger security sector reform or it seriously threatens the framework of civilian control of the military.<sup>18</sup>

Despite the apparent gap between military capabilities and actual requirements for developing partner nation capacity, the geographic combatant commands remain fixated on military engagement activities. The demand signal for resources by combatant commanders clearly indicates the joint force is still the principle contributor to capacity building efforts. Still lacking are the civil development programs targeting institutional

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<sup>15</sup> Obama, 2010 NSS. See president's introduction letter and pages 14-16.

<sup>16</sup> Atlantic Council, Brent Scowcroft Center on International Security, *All Elements of National Power: Moving Toward a New Interagency Balance for US Global Engagement*, Atlantic Council Combatant Command Task Force (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2014), 1.

<sup>17</sup> William G. Pierce, Harry A. Tomlin, Robert C. Coon, James E. Gordon, and Michael A. Mara, "Defense Strategic Guidance: Thoughtful Choices and Security Cooperation," *Joint Forces Quarterly* 74 (3d Quarter, 2014), 73.

<sup>18</sup> Albrecht Schnabel and Marc Krupanski, "Evolving Internal Roles of the Armed Forces: Lessons for Building Partner Capacity," *Prism* 4, no.4 (Washington, DC: 2014), 131-132. For full discussion on the benefits and risks of partner capacity building, see p. 119-137.

reform and resiliency that are best suited for non-military personnel and other government agencies and institutions. Hopefully, anticipated changes in the pending Guidance for Employment of the Force (GEF) will drive more resource-informed planning by combatant commanders and help stem the ever-increasing stress placed on the joint force.<sup>19</sup> Conversely, concepts and initiatives such as the Army's Regionally Aligned Forces and the Marine Corps' Black Sea Rotational Force only serve to encourage further engagement and development initiatives by geographic combatant commanders by catering to their demands. These trends highlight the joint force's willing leadership in global stability efforts despite strategic guidance directing otherwise.

In the end, the joint force's proclivity for posturing for an increased array of potential contingencies and assuming the vanguard of capacity building creates unrealistic operational tempo expectations that threaten long-term readiness. Fulfilling more requirements with less capacity, despite strategic guidance warning against such efforts, establishes dangerous precedents. It creates a continual competition for resources that dangerously thins the force. Further, being forward deployed and available makes military response an easier option for policy makers and strategists in dealing with the next perceived threat to national security.

The next contradiction appears in the innovative approach taken within the joint force itself that fundamentally undermines the very nature of 'jointness'. While the Army and Marine Corps posture towards crisis response and increased expeditionary

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<sup>19</sup> Presentations by Joint Staff, J5 on November 13, 2014 in Norfolk, VA and by U.S. Department of Defense on January 14, 2015 in Washington, DC to JAWS class. Both presenters indicated that changes in the upcoming GEF were predicated on helping resolve the supply and demand issue resulting from the increased requirements by geographic combatant commands in conducting steady-state operations.

engagement requirements, the Air Force and Navy maneuver to preserve major conventional warfare and deterrence systems. By doing so, the Air Force and Navy are relatively negligent in terms of innovating towards the new normal, the central theme of contemporary strategic guidance. Conversely, a closer look at the Army and Marine Corps initiatives reveals that these are likely more of a bid for relevancy than innovations designed to enhance the joint force.

Based on analysis of service vision and posture statements, the Air Force and Navy essentially focus on deterrence and decisive engagements against major state powers, while offering little substance towards how the joint force wins or deters against the most likely threats of new normal security environment. Securing funding to protect critical strategic combat and deterrence capabilities appears to be the dominant ‘innovative’ contribution made by both services. The Air Force remains strongly influenced by the revolution in military affairs construct, placing primacy on ordnance delivery and technology over delivering the personnel needed to influence and win in the land domain.<sup>20</sup> For example, there is concern that the Air Force has insufficient strategic airlift capacity to support major conflict operations and that the airlift fleet program of record contains serious shortfalls.<sup>21</sup> This same strategic airlift also ideally meets the anticipated increased demand for response capabilities for rapidly developing small-scale contingencies without compromising steady state forward presence and engagement activities on a global scale. Therefore, one obvious initiative that supports operations in the new normal is increasing strategic lift capacity and efficiency towards meeting the

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<sup>20</sup> Per the U.S. Air Force 2014 Posture Statement, the top acquisition priorities are the F-35 joint strike fighter (JSF), Long Range Strike Bomber (LRSB), and KC-46A aerial tanker.

<sup>21</sup> Robert C. Cowen. “Theater Airlift Modernization: Options for Closing the Gap,” *Joint Forces Quarterly* 75 (Fourth Quarter, 2014): 13-18.

anticipated demand for theater engagement and responsiveness to multiple, rapidly developing crises. Building more costly F-35s does not.

The Navy's continual near-term degradation of amphibious lift is also an item of concern. Geography and demographic trends indicate that the littorals still represent the most likely locations of future conflict.<sup>22</sup> Given this likelihood and utility of sea basing across the range of military operations, the Navy's priorities appear skewed. Over the next ten years, construction of surface combatant ships exceeds amphibious ships at a rate of 54:5. Even at the peak of amphibious fleet inventory between fiscal years 2026-2030, the Navy's ship building plan still falls short of meeting the desired Marine Corps lift requirements.<sup>23</sup> Any perceived success of the land-based Marine Corps SPMAGTF-CR initiative only exacerbates this situation and serves as a disincentive for the Navy to prioritize amphibious lift in its future strategic designs.

As for the Army and Marine Corps, although fulfilling the intent to innovate, speculation exists as to whether the emerging initiatives are more of a bid for relevancy than well-intentioned innovation. Given the rise in significance of non-state actors and corresponding reduced likelihood of large-scale combat operations, fear likely exists that the general-purpose land components stand to lose more than most from the impending budget reductions. Theoretically, the Air Force and Navy with their respective strategic deterrence platforms, the SOF community, and other elements of national power fulfill a

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<sup>22</sup>U.S. Marine Corps, *36<sup>th</sup> Commandant's Planning Guidance: Innovate, Adapt, Win*, Service Planning Guidance (Washington, DC: 2015), 5.

<sup>23</sup> U.S. Department of the Navy, *Report to congress on the Annual Long-Range Plan for Construction of Naval Vessels for FY2015*, Deputy Chief of Naval Operations (Washington, DC: June, 2014), 5-6; United States Marine Corps, *2014 Report to Congress on the Posture of the United States Marine Corps*, Presented by James F. Amos (Washington, DC: March, 2014), 10. The USMC requires 38 amphibious ships to support simultaneous deployment and employment of two Marine Expeditionary Brigades, but accepts risk in accepting a minimum of 33 ships given fiscal constraints.

large percentage of the security requirements articulated in the 2014 QDR while land domain capabilities focus on enabling engagement activities. The question then becomes whether the Army and Marine Corps moved aggressively towards crisis response and engagement to show relevancy and protect force structure. Further validating this suspicion is a recent collaborative white paper published by the U.S. Army, Marine Corps, and Special Operations community as a reminder of the essential nature of military land components. The white paper, adeptly titled, *Strategic Land Power: Winning the Clash of Wills*, principally argues that the nature of war is constant and the ultimate clash of wills between belligerents is still won or lost in the land domain.<sup>24</sup>

Looking holistically, these contradictions set dangerous precedents, particularly in perpetually over-committing the force and facilitating degradation of essential capabilities like amphibious lift. The latter being uniquely significant given the primacy of the maritime domain in the new normal and reinforced by a noted military theorist's conclusion that "amphibious flexibility is the greatest strategic asset a sea power possesses."<sup>25</sup> The contradictions also compartmentalize efforts across the defense framework pillars. The Air Force and Navy appear predominantly focused on major combat operations and deterrence against state actors, while the Army and Marine Corps focus on operations other than war. The fundamental problem with compartmentalization of responsibilities is that it degrades joint force interoperability. Further, as articulated by the aforementioned white paper, it is unwise to believe the nature of war fundamentally

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<sup>24</sup> U.S. Army, U.S. Marine Corps, and U.S. Special Operations Command, *Strategic Land Power: Winning the Clash of Wills*, White Paper, (Washington, DC).

<sup>25</sup> B.H. Liddell Hart, *Deterrent or Defense: A Fresh Look at the West's Military Position*, (New York: Frederick A Praeger, 1960), 128.

changed such that the U.S. can win decisively in major operations without dominating and compelling adversaries within the land domain.

**Retooling the Force.** The final vulnerability lies in the magnitude of organizational change required to re-tool the joint force and achieve the desired capabilities prescribed by strategic direction. Pursuing emergent trends, such as disaggregated MEUs and deployable, small-scale contingents below major command level, poses numerous challenges. To employ these types of units reliably, the joint force requires substantial renovation in reorganizing, equipping, and training that incurs substantial cost. Otherwise, the current initiatives produce only limited return while continually eroding the long-term readiness of the force.

Disaggregating units and deploying small, tailored forces necessitates pushing increased responsibility down the chain of command. This emergent operational approach risks failure by not providing the small units with the required knowledge and experience to operate effectively in the dynamic operational environment. Conducting engagement activities and responding to crisis as an independent element of the joint force requires the maturity, experience, training, and resources more normally aligned with SOF detachments. These attributes are not reliably present in the average small units assigned to the general-purpose joint force. For example, the principle unit of deployment in the Marine Corps traditionally was the battalion based on the collective leadership, maturity, experience, staff capacity, and sustainability to handle the wide range of issues and contingencies encountered in a deployed environment.<sup>26</sup> Violating

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<sup>26</sup> U.S. Marine Corps, *Expeditionary Force 21 Forward and Ready: Now and in the Future*, 15.



this approach, without corresponding manpower modifications, places more elements of the force at greater risk by being increasingly distributed across the battlespace.

Employing small teams across the contemporary battle space with a wide range of missions requires enabling them with the skills, maturity, and experience to succeed. Doing so necessitates manpower models provide more senior, experienced personnel in billets across the general purpose force. For example, maneuver companies should adopt a model similar to that of the British Royal Marine Commando units with a major (O-4) company commander and sergeant major (E-9) senior enlisted advisor.<sup>27</sup> Similarly, adjusting the ‘up or out’ mentality associated with enlisted promotion to facilitate more collective experience at junior levels is essential if the joint force expects its young tactical leaders to perform like true ‘strategic corporals’. The current general-purpose force organizational construct simply does not reliably provide the required experience, maturity, and intellect needed to operate in the distributed, small unit centric ways required of it and must change. Considering that approximately one quarter of the DoD’s entire budget is tied to personnel, adjusting the force to accommodate a net increase in more senior personnel will not be cheap.<sup>28</sup>

In addition to manpower, retooling also incurs costs tied to equipment and training. The enhanced communication, mobility, and sustainment requirements associated with deploying multiple small elements simultaneously across diverse locations require obvious equipment innovations. Additional skills to perform a wider array of missions

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<sup>27</sup> Observations taken during interactions with multiple Royal Marine Commando companies, individually deployed from their parent organizations in a similar fashion to the company landing team concept, demonstrated that the Royal Marine units at large possessed a distinct advantage in the collective maturity, decision-making, and reliability over their U.S. counterparts due to their organizational makeup.

<sup>28</sup> Congressional Budget Office, “Military Personnel,” <https://www.cbo.gov/taxonomy/term/55/featured> (accessed February 13, 2015).

outside an individual's primary occupational specialty or unit's principal function incur further costs. Similarly, there is a corresponding capability requirement to aggregate these distributed units rapidly in the event of actual contingency, ideally without compromising steady state operations of other units. Like manpower adjustments, failure to address these fundamental issues now threatens to drive the fiscal cost of these innovative concepts to unacceptable levels later. Based on feedback from recent Marine Corps experimentation with its emergent company landing team (CLT) concept during RIMPAC 2014, the challenges encountered in employing and sustaining these dispersed, small units clearly indicate these concepts require further validation.<sup>29</sup>

Continually building and deploying scalable, tailored elements in lieu of traditional cohesive units, only pulls apart the essential capabilities, cohesion, and leadership still required in parent organizations and collectively undermines the readiness, professional growth, and development of the joint force. The joint force also risks under-delivering over the long hall by misapplying its general-purpose force against increasingly SOF-like missions. Going forward, the joint force must adjust manpower models, modify equipment sets, and invest in training and experimentation to validate the emerging concepts and desired capabilities. Otherwise, continuing down this path seriously risks doing at large to the joint force what happened to the artillery community during OIF/OEF.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Commanders and Staff of SPMAGTF 3, "Company Landing Team: Employment from the Sea Base," *Marine Corps Gazette* 99, no.1 (January 2015), 6-12. During the biennial Rim of the Pacific, the Marine Warfighting Laboratory conducted experimentation to test the emerging CLT concept. The key challenges dealt with C2 inefficiencies, insufficient organic fire support capabilities and authorities at the appropriate level, casualty evacuation, and aviation assault support and close air support limitations associated with sustained operations.

<sup>30</sup> Committing artillery units to non-artillery roles and responsibilities in Iraq and Afghanistan generated additional force structure to meet operational requirements of counterinsurgency and stability operations but ultimately resulted in quantifiable degradation in fire support proficiency and loss of institutional

***The ‘Ugly’ Truth: It is only a Matter of Time Before it Happens***

The ‘really’ bad news about joint force direction is that the vulnerabilities identified have potentially serious long-term implications. If the Army and Marine Corps charge recklessly down the path of innovation focused on crisis response and engagement, the joint force risks not being ready for major combat operations. Similarly, the precedents being set in the joint force directly enable political and strategic decisions that can drive the nation towards future costly and potentially misguided military interventions.

**Ready Now, but not when it Matters Most.** U.S. Army Chief of Staff, General Ray Odierno, insightfully postulates “preventing conflict is better than reacting to it” and prevention fundamentally requires presence and contact through engagement.<sup>31</sup> However, developing crisis response and engagement-centric land forces through ill-advised and poorly managed innovation risks neutering essential warfighting capabilities of the joint force. The result is a joint force that looks and acts more like a global civil service department unable to meet the most serious security threats to the nation. Although maintaining the ability to deter and project power with platforms and systems organic in the U.S. Navy and Air Force, the warfighting capabilities of the Army and Marine Corps face serious degradation that jeopardizes the nation’s ability to win decisively in land domain.

Currently, the Army’s Regionally Aligned Forces (RAF) program increases cultural awareness and generates habitual relationships in support of steady state operations.

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knowledge in operational units. For more information see: Sean MacFarland, Michael Shields, and Jeffrey Snow, *The King and I: The Impending Crisis in Field Artillery’s ability to provide Fire Support to Maneuver Commanders*, White Paper. <http://www.npr.org/documents/2008/may/artillerywhitepaper.pdf> (accessed February 13, 2015).

<sup>31</sup>Raymond T. Odierno, *CSA’s Strategic Intent: Delivering Strategic Land Power in an Uncertain World*, (February 5, 2013), <http://www.army.mil/article/95729/> (accessed December 10, 2014).

RAF also facilitate speed and simplify coordination during contingency response scenarios. However, the concept has drawbacks. Program proponents acknowledge the RAF concept is fundamentally about demonstrating relevancy and protecting force structure and risks decreasing readiness over time.<sup>32</sup> Validating this potential risk are experiences offered by senior Army staff officers familiar with RAF implementation indicating that it promotes increased demand by combatant commanders, who now see a pool of resources allocated and apportioned to them, whether real or imagined.<sup>33</sup> The other aspect in assessing RAF is that the Army currently provides only limited numbers of fully trained brigade combat teams ready for decisive action due to budget restraints.<sup>34</sup> These fiscal restraints, coupled with competing operational requirements, forces the Army to apply a tiered readiness strategy that allows only 20% of operational forces to receive the requisite levels of collective training to meet strategic requirements.<sup>35</sup> In the end, the Army RAF concept is not fundamentally flawed. Having Soldiers with regional affiliation, cultural appreciation, and language proficiency makes sense. The concept simply fails in providing a solution for regaining and maintaining full spectrum combat readiness, and in some ways, only contributes to spreading the force too thin.

A similar problem exists in the Marine Corps. Units in aggressive rotation cycles, as those experienced in support of Iraq and Afghanistan, focused on nuanced training

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<sup>32</sup> Kimberly Field, James Learnmont, and Jason Charland, "Regionally Aligned Forces: Business Not as Usual," *Parameters* 43 (Autumn 2013): 59.

<sup>33</sup> Interview with U.S. Army field grade officers, December 15, 2015 and February 23, 2015 in Norfolk, VA. Army officers, both at the Division and Army Forces Command, directly experienced the challenges of implementing RAF citing RAF directly enables continual over-commitment of the force that threatens long-term readiness of the Army.

<sup>34</sup> Department of the Army, *A Statement on the Posture of the United States Army 2014*, Posture Statement presented to the 113<sup>th</sup> Congress, 2d session by John M. McHugh and Raymond T Odierno (Washington, DC: April, 2014), 7-8.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

required for counterinsurgency and stability operations. Degradation logically occurred in core conventional combat capabilities such as, combined arms and amphibious operations. Recognizing the degradation, and as operations in Afghanistan wound down, the Marine Corps published revised Marine Corps Combat Readiness Evaluation (MCCRE) orders to refocus training towards regaining this lost conventional warfighting and combined arms proficiency.<sup>36</sup> Similarly, the Marine Corps redesigned their Integrated Training Exercise (ITX) focused on regaining proficiency in full spectrum combined arms operations. However, not all combat units have the opportunity to attend this essential training.<sup>37</sup> Furthermore, MEU training cycles already impose challenges to gaining and maintaining combined arms proficiency, and any additional training to accommodate disaggregated or split employment, stands to compound this issue.<sup>38</sup>

Instead of regaining proficiency, Marine Corps initiatives such as SPMAGTFs, disaggregated MEU operations, and designs for increased forward presence only replicate conditions for continually degrading essential warfighting capabilities. Although several Marine Corps initiatives positively contribute to the requirements of the new normal, the overall approach falls short mitigating the long-term risks to the joint force.

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<sup>36</sup> Recognizing the urgency of this training deficiency, both First and Second Marine Divisions published their respective updated MCCRE orders prior to the release of the overarching Marine Corps order in October 2014. Although issued preemptively to official higher-level authoritative guidance, the division level planning was coordinated and nested accordingly with ongoing service level planning.

<sup>37</sup> Currently, six ITX's occur annually with one dedicated to reserve units. Of the remaining five, priority goes to the unit deployment program (UDP) bound units, leaving SPMAGTF designated units limited options, and MEU designated units virtually no opportunity to receive this critical training in their respective deployment life cycles.

<sup>38</sup> Training requirements for MEUs place significant burden on the ground combat element's ability to achieve and maintain combined arms proficiency due to extensive special skill and mission training requirements during the pre-deployment period. Further, split and/or disaggregated deployed operations significantly complicate combined arms sustainment training and incur increased risk arising from the divestment of resources and leadership supervision.

The issues ultimately plaguing both the Army and Marine Corps are the leadership gaps and personnel shortfalls found in units not deployed, or preparing to deploy, as highlighted by General Dunford, the 36<sup>th</sup> Commandant of the Marine Corps, in his recently released planning guidance.<sup>39</sup> For numerous reasons, non-deployed units today typically lack the requisite stability and cohesion to properly train, develop, and prepare for the realities of combat operations.<sup>40</sup> The practice of continually moving manpower between units to meet the demands of the operational environment creates instability, disrupts cohesion, but is not readily visible in readiness assessment tools.<sup>41</sup> Therefore, correcting these personnel and leadership voids in non-deployed units stands to stem the ongoing erosion of combat proficiency.

The bottom line is that ill-conceived innovation risks the primary land elements of the joint force being unprepared for conventional combat operations. It arguably remains easier for conventional forces to adapt going down the scale of violence in order to meet requirements of security, stability, and crisis response if grounded in solid conventional combat fundamentals. The inverse is not inherently true. Witness the Iraqi Army, which allegedly achieved sufficient security capabilities to enable the withdrawal of U.S. military personnel, but then fractured under pressure from ISIS, a capable, but largely disorganized conventional threat.<sup>42</sup> Importantly, this argument does not imply that primacy over conventional operations directly translates to proficiency in operations other than major war. Adapting to and preparing for these unique missions must still

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<sup>39</sup> United States Marine Corps, *36<sup>th</sup> Commandant's Planning Guidance: Innovate, Adapt, Win*, 6.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> ISIS is the common contemporary abbreviation for the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria. This organization is also referred to as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) or the Arabic pronunciation Da'ish.

occur. However, enduring civilian resources, such as language proficiency, historical knowledge, and cultural expertise, directly enables acquiring these niche skills as situations require. Conversely, if the military loses the institutional knowledge and proficiency to conduct decisive ground combat operations, there is no one to fill the gap and regaining this proficiency would require substantial blood and treasure.

**Another ‘Ugly’ Issue to Consider.** The second critical implication is that the current trend towards small, independent deployments increases the likelihood of joint force intervention in foreign policy matters. Creating a niche force of global constabularies simply makes it easier for policy makers to commit the joint force to operations not essential for survival or vital to national interests. This implication poses two key aspects for consideration. First, the obvious aspect is that increased military intervention risks stretching the joint force further and continuing the erosion of conventional warfighting primacy. The second aspect is the more vital issue. The real danger in increasing the likelihood of military intervention around the globe, even when it starts benignly as building partner capacity, is that the U.S. does not do ‘limited war’ well.

First, history demonstrates that the U.S. does not fare well in unconventional, limited wars compared to large-scale wars of unlimited proportion.<sup>43</sup> Second, Brigadier General (Retired) Russ Howard, a senior fellow at the Joint Special Operations University, provides a useful perspective on how American strategic culture shapes policy. Howard essentially argues the U.S. is at a marked disadvantage due to the legal and moral

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<sup>43</sup> USSOCOM J-5 presentation to JAWS on 30 Jan 2015. This brief included a power point presentation that summarized the history of conflict from 1915 to 2011 on slide 11. The slide assesses U.S. performance over the century using a win-tie-loss construct. The findings clearly indicate that in wars of unlimited nature, such as WWI or WWII, the U.S. way of war generally produces positive outcomes. Conversely, the U.S. record is poor in unconventional and limited wars. A general reading of U.S. history confirms this record.

constraints influencing the use of force during the conduct of war. Unless survival is at stake or an idealistic “evil incarnate” threat exists, the U.S. demonstrates significant restraint in the use of force, making the military instrument vulnerable and increasingly ineffective in achieving desired outcomes.<sup>44</sup> Third, the revolution of military affairs construct, or rather, the ‘defense transformation’ approach, lends further insight into the challenges of waging limited war. Essentially, this flawed approach attempts to change the nature of war. Taken predominantly from decisive victory over Iraq in 1991 coupled with the 1990’s technology revolution, U.S. policy and strategy increasingly relies on the “faith-based argument that future war would lie mainly in the realm of certainty and therefore could be won quickly and efficiently, at low cost by small forces.”<sup>45</sup> After fourteen years of combat, the U.S. civilian and military leaders should know better.

Creating a future joint force, uniquely capable of involving itself in limited scale conflicts and over-reliant on precision munitions and technology, invites problems with significant consequences. U.S. policy and strategy suffer from confusing the enduring nature of war with the unique characteristics of each conflict America fights. This confusion materializes as a conflict between the belief in easy, bloodless victory and the enduring realities of conflict that continually demonstrate that there are no limits on violence for those wholly committed to a cause.

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<sup>44</sup> Russell D. Howard, “The American Way of War and American Strategic Culture,” JSOU Report 13-8, (December 2013), 7-9. <https://jsou.socom.mil> (accessed 9 February 2015).

<sup>45</sup> H.R. McMasters, “On War: Lessons to be Learned,” *Survival* 50, no. 1 (February-March 2008): 20-21.



## **Chapter 4**

### **Another Approach to Innovation**

The joint force is not broken or in need of major renovation to meet the challenges of the new normal environment. There are three recommendations for correcting the vulnerabilities and potentially fateful consequences facing the joint force and the future of national defense. First, the joint force must reconcile several logic fallacies influencing current joint force direction. Second, the force should reexamine previous organization and employment capabilities and concepts and adapt them to the contemporary security requirements. This provides a more viable alternative in terms of feasibility, cost, and risk. Finally, innovation should target the policy and strategic planning process in lieu of changing current joint force organization and capabilities.

#### ***Reconciling the Logic Fallacies***

Winding down from sustained operations in Afghanistan and Iraq, a natural inclination to re-posture the joint force occurred. Instead of returning to traditional business practices of the pre-9/11 era military, several perspectives and lessons taken from Iraq, Afghanistan, and the larger Global War on Terrorism (GWOT) infiltrated political and strategic outlooks and became the key factors shaping the future joint force. Unfortunately, these factors contain several flawed assessments and conclusions that directly influenced contemporary strategic guidance and emergent joint force initiatives. The following ‘logic fallacies’ represent the major flaws to reconsider moving forward.

**The Benghazi Fallacy.** Within the context of the emerging new normal, perhaps the single most influential factor shaping joint force direction and innovation initiatives was the terrorist attack on the U.S. Consulate in Benghazi, Libya in 2012. This attack not

only validated assessments of the new normal environment, but the associated accusations aimed at the DoD provided a catalyst that accelerated some military departments towards resetting the force with increased emphasis on crisis response and engagement. The problem is the response by the military following Benghazi was an over-reaction to a politically charged debate, not innovation that filled a capability gap.

From inquiries into Benghazi, it is clear the initial criticisms targeting the military's response during the crisis were ungrounded. Findings indicate that culpability belongs with how threat indicators and security postures were handled by DoS, not with the unfounded allegations that the intelligence community or the DoD prevented or delayed relief efforts.<sup>1</sup> Hindsight also provides insight into how some exploited the incident as an opportunity for political gain, not necessarily concerns for national security. The Republican Party clearly used the Benghazi incident as a political platform targeting the Obama administration and future electoral competitors such as Secretary Hillary Clinton. Senator Barbara Boxer of California accurately summarizes the scrutiny surrounding Benghazi as a "witch hunt," less concerned about the facts and relevant aspects of the event than turning the situation into a political scandal to exploit.<sup>2</sup>

Regardless, the political and strategic climate surrounding the Benghazi incident set in motion several government-wide initiatives that influenced the joint force. For example, DoD and DoS collaboration formally articulated the dynamic threats of the new security environment and immediately developed options to deter and mitigate future

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. Senate Select Subcommittee on Intelligence, *Review of the Terrorist Attacks on U.S. Facilities in Benghazi, Libya, September 11-12, 2012*, U.S. Senate, 113<sup>th</sup> Congress (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, January 15, 2014), 9-11, 28-29.

<sup>2</sup> Barbara Boxer, "The GOP's Benghazi Witch Hunt," [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/sen-barbara-boxer/the-gops-benghazi-witch-h\\_b\\_5315857.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/sen-barbara-boxer/the-gops-benghazi-witch-h_b_5315857.html) (accessed 28 Jan 2015).

attacks against U.S. interests.<sup>3</sup> From this collaboration, and responding to the criticism that the military was unable to provide forces in response to the Benghazi attack, the Pentagon officially announced the creation of a Marine crisis response force for North Africa.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, Congressional calls to improve embassy security resulted in increased Marine security guards and the creation of a specialized embassy quick reaction force within the Marine Corps.<sup>5</sup> These initiatives all took shape despite testimony by top military officials during the Benghazi inquiry indicating it was an unrealistic expectation and fundamentally infeasible to be ready for all the potential contingencies that may occur given the multiple threats and complexities in the environment.<sup>6</sup>

In the end, Benghazi validated the perspective of how rapidly crises may develop in the new normal environment. However, Benghazi also influenced well-intentioned, but potentially ill-advised, service initiatives, specifically within the Marine Corps. The stigma associated with Benghazi guarantees geographic combatant commands will not lack substantial crisis response resources any time soon. Similarly, as evidenced by the mission creep ongoing within the Marine Corps SPMAGTF-CR initiative, this innovation may become irreversible despite the intent that it be a temporary solution to forward presence limitations imposed by current amphibious lift shortfalls.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Analysis of classified documents published by the Joint Chiefs of Staff between 2012 and 2013.

<sup>4</sup> Starr, Barbara. "After Benghazi, Marines approved for crisis response force."

<http://security.blogs.cnn.com/2013/04/02/after-benghazi-marines-approved-for-crisis-response-force/>  
(Accessed 31 December 2014).

<sup>5</sup> Gina Harkins, "The crisis-response plus-up: With new missions, units come new opportunities for Marines,"

<http://archive.marinecorpstimes.com/article/20130603/CAREERS/306030013/The-crisis-response-plus-up-new-missions-units-come-new-opportunities-Marines> (accessed January 27, 2015).

<sup>6</sup> U.S. Senate House Armed Services Committee, *Executive Session Benghazi Briefing*, Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, May 21, 2013), 34-36, 42.

<sup>7</sup> Col Ken Detreux and LtCol Derek Snell, interviewed by author on January 6, 2015 in Jacksonville, NC. The SPMAGTF-CR initiative was designed as a temporary mitigation to provide limited crisis response and engagement until sufficient amphibious forces were available again in the Mediterranean region. Throughout 2014, the organization quickly became a pivotal component of AFRICOM as one of the few

**The Wrong Military for the Fight Fallacy.** The second fallacy lies in the assessment and conclusion that the military was poorly equipped, poorly led, and improperly organized to meet the challenges of the future operating environment based on its performance in Iraq and Afghanistan. Popular rhetoric blamed an unprepared military for the last decade of conflict, while seemingly ignoring the overarching strategic factors that truly influenced the respective situations. Andrew Bacevich readily criticizes the U.S. military for failing in Iraq and Afghanistan.<sup>8</sup> James Fallows offers a slightly more palatable tone, but similarly questions the joint force's true effectiveness and insinuates that military failures have little accountability by today's public.<sup>9</sup> President Obama even alludes in the 2012 Defense Strategic Guidance (DSG): "Going forward, we will also remember the lessons of history and avoid repeating the mistakes of the past when our military was left ill-prepared for the future. As we end today's wars and reshape our Armed Forces, we will ensure that our military is agile, flexible, and ready for the full range of contingencies."<sup>10</sup> Consequently, calls for innovation rebalancing became central themes of the strategic guidance shaping the joint force.

These criticisms fail to consider that policy and strategy mismatches directed by the highest levels of government, not a poorly organized, trained, and equipped military,

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assigned forces available to the combatant command. SPMAGTF-CR Africa supported an ever-increasing range of tasks and missions beyond the scope of its original employment. For example, the USAF para-rescue unit responsible for personnel recovery re-deployed with no replacement. Consequently, the SPMAGTF-CR assumed several responsibilities of the personnel recovery mission's portfolio. Further, recent experiences also indicate problems with reconstitution once committed to embassies for security augmentation. Ambassadors tend holding SPMAGTF-CR personnel indefinitely despite the existence of increased security capability within DoS.

<sup>8</sup> Andrew J. Bacevich, *The Limits of Power: The End of American Exceptionalism*, (New York: Holt Paperbacks, 2009), 125-133.

<sup>9</sup> James Fallows, "The Tragedy of the American Military," *The Atlantic* (January/February, 2015). <http://www.theatlantic.com/features/archive/2014/12/the-tragedy-of-the-american-military/383516/> (Accessed January 7, 2015).

<sup>10</sup> U.S. Department of Defense, *Sustaining Global Leadership: Priorities for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Defense*, Defense Strategic Guidance (Washington, DC: January 2012). See the president's introduction letter.

drew the nation into over a decade of counterinsurgency and nation building.

Ambassador Bremmer, with Defense Secretary Rumsfeld's concurrence, decided against military advice to conduct de-Bathification and disband the Iraqi Army, paving the way for the insurgency to rapidly develop and seriously challenge reconstruction efforts.<sup>11</sup>

Similarly, the insurgency in Afghanistan emerged from strategic errors such as creating a highly centralized form of governance and diverting resources to Iraq, not organization and training deficiencies of the joint force.<sup>12</sup> Taking this perspective, the joint force appears more prepared for these contingencies than potentially given credit for. It also demonstrates the joint force's flexibility in adapting to changing environments and operational requirements. Thus, reviewing the policy and strategy mismatches of the last decade seems logical before directing further capability and organization adjustments to the joint force.

**The Tactical Lesson Fallacy.** The third fallacy lies in misinterpreting observations of tactical operations in Iraq and Afghanistan that produced the false assumptions of joint force capabilities. These misguided interpretations also form the basis of the vulnerability associated with retooling the force discussed in Chapter 3. Particularly, emerging Army and Marine Corps organization and employment trends and geographic combatant command requirements emphasizing decentralized, small unit operations, appear centered on two prevailing perceptions taken from Iraq and Afghanistan. The first perception stems from the distributed nature of small unit actions that evolved in Iraq and Afghanistan as both theaters matured and adapted to the requirements of population-

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<sup>11</sup>U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, J7, *Decade of War, Volume I: Enduring Lessons from the Past Decade of Operations*, (Suffolk, VA: Joint and Coalition Operational Analysis Division, June 2012), 3.

<sup>12</sup> David H. Ucko and Robert C. Egnell, "Options for Avoiding Counterinsurgencies," *Parameters* 44, no.1 (spring, 2014): p. 11-12.

centric operations. The second perception stems from the increased interoperability that occurred between general-purpose conventional forces and special operations forces (SOF).

Enduring steady state operations in both Iraq and Afghanistan increasingly devolved from brigade, battalion, and company-sized operations in 2003 down to platoon and squad sized operations in 2012. For example, in Afghanistan in 2010-2011, it was not uncommon to find Marine platoon-sized forward operating bases and squad outposts in Helmand Province. Similarly, in some cases battalions and even companies operated across entire provinces, placing substantially increased leadership, planning, and coordination requirements on increasingly junior leaders.<sup>13</sup> Small unit leaders at the company to squad level operated with ever greater autonomy and dispersion as operations evolved. These same leaders undeniably led the charge combating sources of instability and setting conditions to transfer authority to Afghan counterparts.

Multiple factors enabled this distributed and decentralized operational approach. The dominant factor was the maturity of the theater. Specifically, there were refined mission specificity and parameters, access to robust combat enablers, and a highly tuned support infrastructure. Layers of command, control, fire support, and sustainment mechanisms existed that significantly eased the burden on small unit leaders and enabled them to operate as they did. Belief that the general-purpose joint force retains the ability to deploy and operate in the same manner in future austere and ambiguous environments is fundamentally flawed. Yet, in response to demands from geographic combatant commanders, the Army and Marine innovation efforts advocate for this very capability.

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<sup>13</sup> These observations stem from the author's personal experience while deployed to Afghanistan with Task Force Leatherneck in 2010-2011.

Both services advertise small, tailored force deployment options looking to the future. The Marine Corps' emergent company landing team (CLT) concept and rotational company deployments to the Black Sea and Australia are prime examples of this mindset taking hold.<sup>14</sup> Similarly, the Army operational concept emphasizes decentralized, scalable capabilities both in support of crisis response as well as in support of steady state combatant command activities.<sup>15</sup> Both services clearly recognize the primacy of land domain and the essential aspect of human interaction in shaping, deterring, and winning future conflict. However, these visions and initiatives ignore the gap between reality and perceived capabilities born from the unique experiences in a mature Iraq and Afghanistan.

General-purpose force cooperation and interoperability with SOF also occurred at increasing levels and frequencies as operations evolved. Without doubt, full integration between SOF and the general-purpose force had growing pains. What began as a mystery to most, often-leaving one participant moderately enraged by the actions of the other, eventually became a matter of routine business. Each element not only learned to cooperate effectively, but also willingly did so, even seeking the other's participation in joint ventures to cover capability gaps or exploit resource opportunities. In some cases, traditional SOF duties and responsibilities merged with those of the general-purpose force on the ground. As reconstruction efforts got underway, the joint force actively

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<sup>14</sup> Per the service vision contained in *Expeditionary Force 21*, company landing teams are conceptually a potential option to serve as the ground combat element for SPMAGTFs. The current posture statement also highlights that the Marine Corps conducts rotational company deployments to Romania and Darwin, Australia principally focused on engagement, demonstrating commitment, and limited crisis response.

<sup>15</sup> U.S. Department of the Army, *A Statement on the Posture of the United States Army 2014*, Posture Statement presented to the 113<sup>th</sup> Congress, 2d session by John M. McHugh and Raymond T Odierno (Washington, DC: April, 2014), 4; Raymond T. Odierno, *CSA's Strategic Intent: Delivering Strategic Land Power in an Uncertain World*, (February 5, 2013), <http://www.army.mil/article/95729/> (accessed December 10, 2014).

assumed a training role on a grand scale. For example, in both Iraq and Afghanistan, the responsibility for building and training the new Iraqi and Afghan security forces quickly shifted to the general-purpose forces, except for designated partnered SOF units. Nearly all elements of the joint force played a role, but the Army and Marine Corps bore the majority share. Just as Soldiers and Marines increasingly conducted distributed operations, they simultaneously found themselves conducting partnered training and operations with their host nation counterparts. Consequently, the increased distributed and decentralized nature of operations, coupled with increased exposure to special operations roles, responsibilities, and interoperability produced a perception of the general-purpose force that has serious limitations.

In drawing the wrong conclusions from the last decade, the joint force faces danger as Army and Marine Corps initiatives threaten to overwhelm small unit leaders by employing them outside their capabilities. Without the overhead provided by organic command and staff functions, decentralized small unit operations are severely limited. Efforts to mitigate these concerns include reinforcing small units with enablers to facilitate mission accomplishment while sending only the minimum amount of personnel forward. This approach ignores the simple fact that by layering these capabilities, it quickly outstrips the ability of small unit leaders given their typical limited depth and breadth of experience and training outside their primary areas of expertise. Further, it strips these same niche capabilities away from the larger parent organizations, creating greater capability gaps. Another misguided mitigation measure is the tendency to place senior leaders on top of small units to provide additional supervision, guidance, and decision-making support. Although the forward deployed elements fill these leadership



and experience voids, this technique creates a corresponding leadership vacuum in the now ‘leaderless’ donor units.<sup>16</sup> Both of these emerging practices do nothing but violate time-tested organization models and leadership principles. Over time, this compromises long-term readiness as combined arms proficiency, discipline, esprit, and professionalism erode from a lack of sufficient leadership, supervision, and training.

In its current form, the general-purpose force is simply not a viable option to generate the additional SOF-like capabilities demanded by the current operational approach and service desires. Despite the increased interoperability and blurring of responsibilities occurring over the last decade, remembering that these distributed and integrated operations occurred as the theaters matured is essential. Failing to rationalize this basic fact risks both the mission and the welfare of the force that deploys outside its capabilities. Without significant investment in organizational restructuring, trying to create additional SOF-like capabilities out of the general-purpose force is a misguided effort, and occurs at the expense of losing conventional capacity.<sup>17</sup>

### ***No Need to Reinvent the Wheel***

Prior to September 11, 2001, the joint force maintained robust forward presence and multiple capabilities to engage globally and respond to both conventional and humanitarian crises effectively with existing organization and doctrine. All elements of the joint force possessed some form of forward presence in locations from Europe to the

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<sup>16</sup> Loss incurred by ‘donor units’ is not a linear, but rather magnified by a factor of two or more given the traditional hierarchy and span of control in military organizations. For example, providing a lieutenant platoon leader to oversee squad activities strips two to three other squads of their commander.

<sup>17</sup> In drawing this conclusion, this article does not argue that training foreign militaries is inappropriate for the general-purpose force. The observation only serves to highlight how the lines between conventional and SOF blurred over the last decade and influenced contemporary strategic guidance and operational approaches. The demand signal by combatant commanders for the joint force to participate increasingly in security cooperation activities is a strong indicator that the belief that training indigenous forces is the proprietary responsibility of the special operations community is long gone.

Pacific. These forces represented a commitment to allies, deterred aggression, enabled partner capacity building, and served as sourcing solutions for contingency response options. The Navy and Marine Corps performed similar functions, but with the added flexibility gained from sea basing, by deploying rotational maritime presence patrols using a variety of capabilities from aircraft carriers to amphibious ships. Further, the Army and Marine Corps maintained CONUS-based alert forces ready to fly anywhere at a moment's notice. The joint force even maintained maritime prepositioning squadrons capable of delivering a brigade worth of Army and Marine Corps equipment sets nearly anywhere in the world. This non-inclusive list represents just a few of the options available previously to strategists and operational planners. Therefore, the joint force should focus its efforts towards refining these past practices for crisis response and increased engagement using contemporary insight and technologies instead of pushing innovation for essentially the same baseline security requirements that existed prior to 9/11. This approach should focus more on adaptation than wholesale reengineering to account for changes in the strategic environment (e.g., the rise of non-state actors, transnational influences, and rapidly developing conflict). Doing so is more fiscally and innovatively responsible and retains a longer view towards preserving essential capabilities and structure of the joint force.

Besides adapting viable past joint force employment and organization concepts, leaders should also review the policies and processes governing use of the joint force. Addressing the doctrine and policies for the global force management process is one option. For example, does the current practice of allocating forces over one year in advance of deployment to geographic combatant commands support the requirements of

the rapidly changing, dynamic nature of the new normal environment?<sup>18</sup> Reviewing and eliminating unnecessary bureaucratic inefficiencies and complexities in the force deployment process offers another option to increase efficiency and flexibility. The force deployment process must afford greater latitude and flexibility to operational planners to modify requirements. Attempts to globally prioritize and synchronize strategic lift are ineffective. Current practices are simply too rigid and inflexible requiring unrealistic planning horizons to request and schedule strategic lift. Ultimately, the new normal environment requires deployment practices that allow operational planners the maximum latitude in seizing training opportunities, adjusting to changing requirements, and retaining the capacity to meet emergent needs without throwing the system into disarray. Greater capacity is clearly part of the issue in terms of both aviation and amphibious lift. However, given the budget environment, process refinement is arguably the more fiscally responsible and realistic option.

### ***Innovate where it Matters Most***

If innovation remains the central theme in strategic guidance, then the target of innovation must shift from the joint force to other elements within the national security continuum. Looking holistically, the process for creating and vetting national policy and strategy is more in need of innovation than the joint force. The U.S. tends to focus on strategic factors most convenient for the current political environment, not necessarily those that inform the best policy and strategy decisions for the long-term welfare of the nation. America also continually fails to draw the most useful lessons from history as it

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<sup>18</sup> Scott F. Benedict, “A Maritime Warfighting Philosophy,” *Marine Corps Gazette* 98, no. 11 (November 2014): 52.

looks to the future, once again confusing short-term political agendas with strategic thinking. For example, politics spun Benghazi out of proportion, not true national security concerns, and the result influenced contemporary joint force direction. This paper does not seek to incite a political-military divide debate, merely highlight that there is compelling evidence suggesting that flawed policy and strategy are more of a national vulnerability looking to the future, not the organization and capabilities of the joint force.

This paper offers two considerations along this line of thought. First, domestic politics must balance more effectively with foreign policy decisions to keep national interests clearly defined, appropriately resourced, and prioritized. In layman's terms, this means divorcing policy decisions from re-election agendas and doing what is right for the long-term health of the nation. For example, after September 2001, the U.S. became increasingly obsessed with engaging weak states to deter future attacks against the homeland. Do weak states really threaten national interests or survival? Amy Zegart, a senior fellow at the Hoover Institution, presents compelling evidence suggesting that U.S. strategy is distracted from addressing real threats to security by confusing the concept of priorities and blurring the lines between national ideals and interests.<sup>19</sup> The corresponding question becomes whether current emphasis on global engagement and capacity building stems from a misapplied strategic outlook grounded in political opportunity instead of matters of true national security.

Second, U.S. policy and strategy elites need to better understand and accept that the fundamental nature of war does not change; only its character does. Currently, the American way of war is constrained in its attempt to deny war its true nature. A false

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<sup>19</sup> Amy Zegart, "Stop Drinking the Weak Sauce," *Foreign Policy* (February 23, 2015). <http://foreignpolicy.com/> (accessed February 24, 2015).

belief in technology and precision munitions coupled with the frailty of U.S. commitment grounded in casualty aversion is America's Achilles heel. U.S. policy and strategic outlooks must reconcile their perspectives with the true nature of war, accepting the inherent violence and suffering associated with compelling an opponent to achieve whatever political ends it seeks. Accepting that the nature of war remains constant does not prohibit the joint force from participating in operations other than war or restrain U.S. policy and strategy from mitigating threats to U.S. interest. However, it does deter misguided policy and strategy that undermines effectiveness and degrades essential warfighting capabilities, especially within the land domain.

Implementing these policy and strategy innovations is a topic worthy of its own dissertation. However, it arguably begins by re-educating senior policy officials and ends with joint force leaders providing their best military advice to shape the policy objectives and strategies that ultimately govern joint force organization and employment. One method to educate policy makers is to incorporate professional staff personnel into joint war colleges in a similar manner that other governmental organizations attempt to do such as, Department of State (DoS) and the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA).<sup>20</sup> Focused study and interaction with military officers on topics such as the nature of war, termination criteria, military end states, and the limits of military power would clearly help alleviate tensions between the policy and strategy mismatches resident in the American way of war.

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<sup>20</sup> During the Joint Advanced Warfighting School (JAWS), 2014-2015 academic year, inter-agency students comprised 15% of the student body with DoS and DIA accounting for the majority.

## **Chapter 5**

### **It is Not Too Late**

In today's complex environment, a strong, conventionally focused military is the best guarantee for continued national security. Strategy and policy mismatches, not existing joint force capabilities, resulted in the costly military engagements of the last decade – the outcomes of which are still underdetermined. Consequently, the joint force must resist the overt call to innovate blindly and look more closely at historical precedent. Otherwise, the nation risks structuring the military for a current threat that is not necessarily the gravest or most vital, only to be unprepared when the worst case eventually materializes.

The historical precedent set at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century is an excellent example to consider before proceeding towards groundless innovation and potentially causing irreparable harm to the joint force. After the bitter and costly counterinsurgency campaign in Vietnam, the U.S. military did not fundamentally reset itself with a focus on counterinsurgency and partner-nation capacity building. Lessons from Vietnam clearly indicated a gap existed in U.S. operational capability for waging counterinsurgency warfare. Logically, something should have occurred to rectify this gap, especially given the proxy war proclivity occurring under the greater Cold War construct of the time. One may conclude the existence of a viable near peer competitor in the Soviet Union strongly influenced the decision not to innovate after Vietnam. Therefore, instead of fighting the last war, the joint force regained its conventional focus, integrated technological advancements, and remained focused on winning decisively in combat operations. The military did not focus on counterinsurgency or capacity building and delivered

impressive results during operations in Panama, Kuwait, and the initial stages of Afghanistan and Iraq. Why does policy and strategy governing the joint force take a different approach today? Do Russia, Iran, and emerging China not represent potential long-term threats requiring viable military capacity to deter and potentially combat? Does enabling partner capacity and responding to small-scale contingencies really provide for sufficient national defense? These questions are valid and require serious attention before the joint force incurs long-term damage.

Analysis of the anticipated future environment and existing joint force capabilities indicates that achieving the desired capabilities required for the new normal does not require wholesale innovation. Taking a more restrained adaptive approach is sufficient, practical, and prudent given the fiscal realities of today. Placing innovation ‘center stage’ as the joint force prepares for the future, without more specific guidance, risks setting in motion changes that do more potential harm to national security than good while incurring increased cost over the long run to correct, the exact opposite of what the central themes of contemporary guidance seek. Unlike the period between WWI and WWII when the organizational, technical, and strategic rational existed for a host of innovations, the equivalent requirements are not readily present or clearly articulated today.<sup>1</sup> Instead, the joint force confuses adapting to temporary resource limitations with innovative changes in organizational structures and employment methodologies like the Regionally Aligned Forces concept, the Marine SPMAGTF-CR units, and distributed ARG/MEU tendencies. Adapting to the nuanced security concerns and fiscal priorities of

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<sup>1</sup> See Williamson Murray and Allan R. Millett, *Military Innovation in the Interwar Period* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

today is what the joint force must do, not fundamentally alter the elements of the force principally responsible for decisive combat operations short of nuclear war.

Restraining the urge to innovate is only the first step. Correcting the course and speed of the joint force also requires reassessing past lessons to validate the real capability requirements and gaps looking to the future. This begins with addressing the logic fallacies driving the perceptions and actions that brought the joint force to where it is today. For example, blind acceptance of the Marine Corps initiatives that allegedly fill crisis response capability voids is not advisable. Providing increased embassy security guards and establishing quick reaction forces to enable DoS security posturing is a rational enduring contribution. However, deploying three SPMAGTFs across the globe may be unnecessary and have unintended consequences that ultimately threaten the long-term readiness and capabilities of the joint force.

It is also essential the joint force reassess what military capabilities truly exist and what capabilities are misperceptions from the last war. This implies that the joint force look closely at strategies, capabilities, and doctrine resident in the pre-9/11 era that remain sufficient in meeting the emergent demands of the new normal. The conclusion likely leads the joint force away from innovation and towards adaptation to achieve a more balanced approach in filling the real capability gaps. For example, adjusting funding priorities to generate more strategic airlift and amphibious shipping in the near-term over F-35s and more Navy destroyers provides the needed flexibility and increased capacity to meet the anticipated dynamic response options of the future. Moving forward, there is only one legitimate target for true innovation. The critical vulnerability



facing the joint force lies at the nexus of policy, strategy, and employment of the military instrument of power, not the joint force itself.

A crisis response and engagement-centric military, employed haphazardly with no easily identifiable policy aims, offers little in actually safeguarding US interests. As one author succinctly articulates, "... while forward deployed forces demonstrate the Nation's commitment to its security interests, they are not a panacea for countering aggression..." and that "it is a fallacy to believe that simply being in the region is sufficient to achieve these goals. Instead, it is the ability to respond to aggression or initiate action in support of policy that truly matters."<sup>2</sup> In other words, dots on a geographic combatant commander's map indicating the extensive depth and breadth of U.S. engagement activities, but in reality offering no true warfighting capabilities, does not deter threats such as ISIS. Deterrence occurs only when enemies fear the reality of their military being decisively defeated, U.S. troops in their capitol, and their continued survival is ultimately at stake. Maintenance of conventional warfighting capabilities achieves this military primacy. Current defense strategy that overemphasizes the role of engagement and crisis response places undue stress on the joint force and fosters 'bad habits' that become institutionalized when future generations of military and political leaders know nothing else. Nuances of the new normal environment are real and require attention, but the existing organization, capabilities, and employment methods of joint force are sufficient to meet the security requirements with adaptive approaches, not innovative reengineering.

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<sup>2</sup> J.C. Lewis, "Power Projection: Avoidance of war in the Pacific," *Marine Corps Gazette* 98, no.9 (September 2014): 31.

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VITA

LtCol Cassidy was born in Evergreen Park, Illinois and commissioned a Marine Officer in 1995 after graduating from Purdue University in West Lafayette, Indiana. As an infantry officer, LtCol Cassidy served as platoon commander and executive officer with 3d Light Armored Reconnaissance Battalion in 29 Palms, California. Selected for a supplemental military occupation specialty (MOS) program, he served as a logistics officer in both company command and operations billets before returning to the infantry.

In 2002, LtCol Cassidy attended the U.S. Army Infantry Captain's Career Course in Fort Benning, Georgia. Immediately following, he deployed with Third Battalion, 2d Marine Regiment to OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM and then Djibouti, Africa as part of the anti-terrorism security force. He then served as battalion operations officer before joining and deploying to Iraq with Regimental Combat Team-2 as the Assistant Operations Officer from 2005 to 2006.

From 2006-2009, LtCol Cassidy commanded Recruiting Station Cleveland, Ohio before attending the Naval Command and Staff College in Newport, Rhode Island. He then assumed duties as the Future Operations Officer with Second Marine Division (Forward), deploying to Afghanistan in 2011 in support of OPERATION ENDURING FREEDOM. LtCol Cassidy commanded Third Battalion, 2d Marine Regiment from Dec 2011 to Feb 2014 and deployed as the ground combat element for 26<sup>th</sup> Marine Expeditionary Unit March-Nov 2013.